

VZCZCXRO0627
OO RUEHLH RUEHPW
DE RUEHIL #0723/01 0961441

ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 061441Z APR 09
FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
INFO RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0084
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0017
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 4706
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 1406
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 7021
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 5949
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFIS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 000723

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/19/2019
TAGS: PGOV PTER PHUM PK
SUBJECT: SWAT FLOGGING VIDEO GENERATES OUTRAGE

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, for reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Civil society groups launched demonstrations across Pakistan April 4-5 to protest the video-taped flogging by the Taliban of a 17 year-old girl in Swat. Secular politicians condemned the incident, and newly restored Supreme Court Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry called upon the government to produce the victim in court. She declined, denying the entire incident and saying that it would be inappropriate for a purdah-observing woman to appear before TV cameras and spectators. As with many human rights cases in Pakistan, the facts remain in question--some challenged where and when the incident took place and the nature of the victims' alleged crime (merely leaving the house with a non-relative male or having illicit relations with her father-in-law). Various Taliban spokesman defended the incident while others denied involvement.

¶2. (C) The full political impact of the video has yet to be felt. Northwest Frontier Province officials and TNSM leader Sufi Mohammed claimed the video was a conspiracy to derail the Swat peace accord. President Zardari has yet to sign the Nizam-e-Adl (interpreted as Shari'a) regulations that will seal the peace accord. Knowing the negative effect of signing the regulations on the western donor community, Zardari has been reluctant to agree. However, at this point, not signing may provoke another round of bloodshed in Swat and cost Zardari the political cooperation of the Awami National Party, a key coalition ally. Unless the Army reverses course and agrees to fight the Taliban in Swat, Zardari may have no choice--with or without a controversial video--but to sign Nizam-e-Adl. End Summary.

¶3. (SBU) As TV stations April 3-5 continuously played a video showing the flogging of a 17 year old girl by Taliban in Kala Killay, Swat, Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP), GOP and civil society leaders reacted with outrage. President Zardari "was shocked over this act of barbarism" and called for the arrest of those responsible. PM Gilani condemned the incident, calling it shameful and against Islam, which "teaches us to treat women politely." Gilani ordered an official inquiry. Meanwhile newly restored Supreme Court Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry took suo moto notice of the incident calling it a violation of fundamental constitutional rights. He demanded the federal Interior Minister and NWFP law enforcement officials produce the victim, identified as Chand Bibi, in court on April 6; when officials were unable to produce the victim, Chaudhry postponed further court action. Bibi is quoted in the press April 6 as denying the incident ever happened and saying it would be inappropriate for a purdha-observing Pakistani woman to appear in court in the presence of TV cameras and

spectators.

¶4. (SBU) There were protests across the country April 4-5, including a rally by Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) in Karachi; MQM leader Altaf Hussain called for a public hanging of those responsible. Additional rallies took place in Islamabad, Peshawar, Lahore, Multan, Hyderabad, Khaipur, and Sialkot. Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Spokesperson Fauzia Wahab called the incident "barbaric." PPP leader and former Information Minister Sherry Rehman called for a parliamentary debate on the flogging; the Women's Parliamentary Caucus and Speaker Mirza denounced the lashing. Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) leader Nawaz Sharif said in a statement that the incident was an open violation of the constitution and tantamount to "humiliation of humanity;" he called on the government to stop such "brutal happenings." PML-N leader Javed Hashmi said the flogging was against the Islamic concept of justice and humanity. Tehreek-i-Insaaf leader Imran Khan said "perpetrators of this heinous act are not human beings. They are savages."

¶5. (SBU) Human Rights Committee of Pakistan (HRCP) Chairperson Asma Jahangir, along with a wide variety of human rights advocates, also condemned the incident. The HRCP announced April 5 that it was launching a multi-pronged campaign across Pakistan to challenge Talibanization and urged the government to take all political parties and the military on board in adopting a clear strategy against extremism. Referring to the deal between the NWFP government and Sufi Mohammad to implement Nizam-e-Adl (interpreted as Shari'a law) in Swat, Jahangir accused the

ISLAMABAD 00000723 002 OF 002

national and provincial governments of succumbing to the terrorists and giving them a free hand to attack people and disgrace women. Zardari has not yet signed the Nizam-e-Adl regulations but is under pressure from the Awami National Party (ANP) to bless judicial changes already being implemented on the ground. ANP leader Afrasab Khattak called for holding an inquiry.

Conspiracy to Disrupt the Swat Peace Deal

¶6. (SBU) Condemnation, however, was not universal. Taliban spokesman Muslim Khan acknowledged that his group was responsible for the flogging in public, "because no indoor arrangements for Islamic punishment could be made as we are at war with the government." Khan suggested that the Taliban had handed out a "lenient" punishment to the girl, who was accused alternatively of having illicit relations with her father-in-law or leaving her home in the presence of a man who was not her husband. Khan claimed the men doing the lashing were the girls' relatives and that the local Taliban awarded a punishment of 40 lashes after getting a verdict from a local mufti; at the time the Qazi courts were not yet in operation. However, the Swat Tehreek-e-Taliban and Tehreek Nifaz Shariat-i-Muhammadi (TNSM) later denied the incident and termed the video a fake.

¶7. (SBU) NWFP Chief Minister Hoti insisted that the video was fake and represented an attempt to derail the Swat peace accord; he suggested that if she had really been flogged 35-40 times, the victim would not have been able to get up and walk away as she did in the video. Hoti expressed the hope that the video would not deter Zardari from signing the Nizam-e-Adl accords. NWFP spokesman Mian Iftikhar said that the flogging took place on January 3, before the peace deal with the Taliban. "We believe there is a conspiracy to sabotage the peace process by airing a video recorded before the deal." He insisted the incident took place nine months ago. Iftikhar said the ANP government was fighting on the frontlines and those "sitting in drawing rooms" should come out and see what is happening on the ground. TNSM leader Sufi Mohammed, who negotiated the Swat peace deal, also termed the release of the video as a bid to sabotage the

peace process.

¶ 8. (SBU) Newly elected Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) leader Munawar Hassan played down the flogging as "a small thing. We should talk about drone attacks, not minor things." JI leader Liaqat Baloch, however, said that those who had signed the peace deal in Swat should answer the nation regarding the incident. Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam leader Fazlur Rehman attacked NGOs, saying they blew the incident out of proportion and were always ready to protest before facts could be confirmed. He advised the government not to let the video deter implementation of the Swat peace accord.

¶ 9. (C) Comment: News of the flogging video coincided with additional suicide bombings in and around Islamabad. The English language press was almost universally outraged by the flogging with many editorials calling on civil society to rise up before Taliban rule spread beyond Swat. One English-language newspaper noted that even if this particular video was a fake, the Taliban had carried out over 25 public floggings this year for various offenses in Swat and the tribal areas. The Urdu press was more restrained but still critical of how the Taliban were tarnishing Pakistan's image. Civil society and the judiciary are feeling flush with victory over the restoration of the Chief Justice; however, whether they can maintain momentum and convince the general public of the growing dangers of Talibanization remains to be seen.

PATTERSON